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Multiliteracies, Pedagogy and Identities: Teacher and Student Voices from a Toronto Elementary School

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In this article, I draw on an ethnographic case study of one Toronto elementary school, as part of a Canada-wide action research project: Multiliteracy Project (www.multiliteracies.ca). I have explored how Perminder, a grade-4 teacher, developed a multiliteracies pedagogy, drawing on her own and her students' identities and linguistic and cultural forms of capital to create learning opportunities for all students to access the English mainstream curriculum. Alternative pedagogical choices included students' creation of multimodal dual language "identity texts" (Cummins, Bismilla, Cohen, Giampapa, & Leoni, 2005a), and identity work, expanding literacy practices valued within Canadian classrooms.

Key words: critical pedagogies, critical literacies, ESL/EAL, identities, Multiliteracy Project, urban schools

Dans cet article, l'auteure part d'une étude de cas ethnographique portant sur une école primaire de Toronto, étude réalisée dans le cadre d'un projet de recherche-action pancanadien, The Multiliteracy Project (www.multiliteracies.ca). Elle analyse comment Perminder, une enseignante de 4^e année, a mis au point une pédagogie en matière de multilittératies. Puisant dans sa propre identité et dans celles de ses élèves ainsi que dans diverses formes de capital linguistiques et culturelles, elle offre à tous ses élèves la possibilité d'apprendre et ainsi d'avoir accès au curriculum standard en anglais. Parmi les choix pédagogiques novateurs figuraient la création par les élèves de « textes identitaires » (Cummins et coll. 2005a) multimodaux en deux langues et des travaux portant sur l'identité, élargissant ainsi les pratiques en matière de littérature jugées utiles dans les classes canadiennes.

Mots clés : pédagogies critiques, littératies critiques, ESL/EAL, identités, The Multiliteracy Project, écoles urbaines.

In the twenty-first century, the effects of globalization can be seen across the educational landscape of Canadian urban schools through the increase of cultural and linguistic diversity, resulting in both educational challenges and opportunities. The projected increasing diversity across urban centres such as Toronto will continue to be a 'fact of life' (Hiebert, 2005). Hiebert notes that:

... the cultural composition of immigrants to Canada has become remarkably globalized in the past few decades; and the process of immigrant settlement in Canada is geographically uneven, and highly concentrated in the largest metropolitan centres, especially Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver ... these three in particular, are therefore at the forefront of Canadian population change, and are becoming more diverse every day. Given the pervasive sense that relatively high rates of immigration will continue into the foreseeable future, increasing diversity will be a fact of life for many years to come. (p.3)

Within a Canadian educational climate that has seen increased standardized testing to raise literacy attainments, schools are challenged to rethink what forms of literacy to teach and what pedagogical options are most appropriate to teach a linguistically diverse student body to meet the demands of an Information Age economy (Cummins, Brown, & Sayers, 2007). The impact of economic and technological change has brought about the reconfiguration of the labour market and the very skills and knowledges that function as valued capital within these new structures. Early (2006) notes that it is crucial to rethink:

... how to take advantage of the current context, as 'opening new educational and social possibilities' (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 12), to promote democratic education and human needs, rather than to primarily serve the needs of business and a globalized economy. (p. 67)

She suggests that one way to take advantage of the "current context" is to harness diversity (i.e., students' linguistic and cultural resources) and to reconceptualize pedagogies that build on these resources, recognizing also the "multimodal and multimediated" (p. 67) ways in which communication is now taking place and the types of "knowledge" students need for their future.

Entering this current educational discourse, I have investigated how a grade-4 teacher – Perminder at Coppard Glen Public School ¹ in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) – has developed a multiliteracies pedagogy that not only builds on her own personal and professional identities but also draws from the linguistic and cultural forms of capital and identities of students' and their families (Bourdieu, 1991; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). She designed her multiliteracies pedagogy to open up opportunities for students to access the academic literacies that are valued within schools. Through several curricular modifications that included the writing of dual language, multimodal "identity texts" (Cummins, Bismilla, Cohen, Giampapa, & Leoni, 2005a), Perminder's, her students', and their families' multilingual identities were validated and drawn upon as a resource for learning within the mainstream classroom, thus expanding the notion of school literacy as monolingual English literacy only. In this case study, I point to the importance of students' taking ownership of their learning for school success, and how this takes place through the incorporation of students' linguistic and cultural forms of capital, and their identities.

RETHINKING LITERACIES IN MULTILINGUAL CONTEXTS

Education is the nexus where social, political, and ideological discourses about what counts as valuable linguistic and cultural knowledge, and who has access to these legitimate forms of capital, and the identity positions assigned to them. These dominant discourses function precisely to exclude social groups who do not possess the right forms of capital and the literacy practices valued within educational contexts from accessing symbolic and material resources. Heller and Martin-Jones (2001) note that:

Educational choices . . . regarding structures, programs, practices, or materials, are clearly much more than choices about how to achieve linguistic proficiency. They are choices about how to distribute linguistic resources and about what value to attribute to linguistic forms and practices. They are choices embedded in the economic, political and social interests of groups and that have consequences

¹ Names of the students and teacher, who were partners in the research, are not pseudonyms; they appear on the website.

for the life chances of individuals as well as for the construction of social categories and relations of power. (p. 419)

These discourses have real life consequences for immigrant communities whose linguistic and cultural forms of capital and identities are devalued within current educational practices (Martin-Jones, 2007). Literacy as conceptualized within current educational curricula and pedagogical practices needs to be reconceptualized to encompass the multilingual, multiliterate practices that linguistic minority students bring into the classroom.

Ongoing academic and social debates that have taken a critical perspective on the nature of literacy have challenged thinking about what it means to be literate and the forms of capital connected to being positioned as literate (Baynham & Prinsloo, 2001; Gee, 1996, 2000). Scholars working in the field of Literacy Studies (Feire & Macedo, 1987; Heath, 1983) and New Literacy Studies (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000; Gregory & Williams, 2000; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005; Street, 1995, 1999, 2000, 2005), multilingual literacies (Blackledge, 2000; Martin-Jones & Jones, 2000), and critical literacies (Cummins, 2001; Luke & Grieshaber, 2004) have problematized the very notion of literacy as a discrete set of skills, reframing literacy as a set of socially and culturally constituted practices enacted across and within social and institutional spaces. Research across these fields has highlighted the disjuncture between the literacy practices that are valued within schools and society, positioning the literacy of multilingual and multicultural communities as devalued and peripheral.

Research on multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996) further highlights the importance of creating learning environments to engage students in a wide range of literacy practices that are creative and cognitively challenging and that bring together text-based and multimedia forms of meaning making. A multiliteracies pedagogy maps out how pedagogic design that includes Situated Practice, Overt Instruction, Critical Framing, and Transformed Practice can create learning opportunities for all students. This pedagogic design resonates with the underlying principles encapsulated in Cummins' (2001) Academic Expertise framework that foregrounds the importance of critical inquiry and the co-construction of

knowledge as fundamental for cognitive development and effective learning.

Although the shape of literacy has changed, traditional notions of literacy persist within Canadian schools as linear and text-based, and formal assessments of academic achievement are tied to these traditional notions. At a policy level, there has been recognition of the need to expand what literacy means within a globalized, twenty-first century context. This recognition is evident in the definition of the Expert Panel on Literacy, Ontario Ministry of Education, of what counts as literacy in grades 4 to 6: "The ability to use language and images in rich and varied forms to read, write, listen, speak, view, represent, and think critically about ideas" (as cited in Cummins, 2007, p. 2).

This redefinition of literacy and the practices tied to it draw on the multimodal ways to represent and critically engage with ideas, acknowledging new technologies and new ways of communication that are prevalent in the twenty-first century global landscape. However, despite recognition for the changing shape of literacy, a gap continues in how curriculum and pedagogies in Canadian schools prepare students for the challenges of the new economy. The educational discourses that prevail focus on English, monocultural, text-based literacies. Furthermore, there is a particular need to address educational access for English Second Language (ESL/EAL) students whose multilingual and multiliterate practices are not being pedagogically incorporated as vital resources to access academic literacies (Taylor, Bernhard, Garg, & Cummins, 2008).

Cummins' (2001) foundational critical research on literacy attainment of multilingual and culturally diverse ESL students shows clearly that, although they rapidly acquire conversational English, at least a five-year lag is necessary for these students to acquire academic English skills in line with their English-speaking peers.

Cummins' (2001) development of a theory of Academic Expertise that incorporates and emphasizes critical literacy, active self-regulated learning, deep understanding, and building on students' prior knowledge connects to points raised by Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000) as the necessary conditions needed for learning to take place. Cummins (2001) stipulates that instruction must focus on three integral and intersecting elements:

- (1) Focus on Meaning (which delineates a focus on critical literacy moving beyond a surface-level reading of a text);
- (2) Focus on Language (i.e., understanding not only linguistic codes but a critical language awareness of how language as a form of capital intersects with power and functions within society to include or exclude people from achieving specific social goals); and
- (3) Focus on Use (where instruction creates opportunities for all students to produce knowledge, create multimodal texts, and respond to diverse social realities).

What is also central in this framework is identity investment (Cummins et al., 2005a, 2005b): the recognition that any effective and inclusive pedagogy needs to view the interactions that take place not only between teachers and students but also with peers and parents as carving out interpersonal spaces in which knowledge is generated and exchanged, and identities are negotiated (Hall, 1990; Hall & du Gay, 1996; Norton, 2000; Norton Peirce, 1995; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). Learning can be enhanced when such interactions capitalize cognitive engagement and identity investment.

The underlying principles for the development of a multiliteracies pedagogy draw from the principles that are sketched above and connect multilingual practices, identities (of teachers and students), and the multimodal forms of meaning making that students are engaged in across diverse spaces as central to development of students' range of literacies within school contexts.

In the following sections, I map out how teachers and students at Coppard Glen engaged in the types of interactions where first language (L1) literacies and cultural practices and identities were foregrounded as resources in the pedagogical choices being made within the classrooms.

METHOD: MAPPING THE EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE

The educational context of this case study is Coppard Glen Public School situated in the North York Region School Board in the Greater Toronto Area. The demographic landscape for this school involves a high influx of new immigrants from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and China. The

school is located within an established, middle-class neighbourhood, where inter-generational members of families may live in a single home.

At the time of this research, Coppard Glen, established for 10 years, had approximately 700 students from multi-racial, multilingual, multicultural, and multi-faith backgrounds. The school consisted of approximately 40 teachers, who were predominantly of Anglo-Canadian background, and of whom 12 were racial and/or linguistic minority teachers.

The linguistic landscape of the school was diverse, with the four most common home languages being Tamil, Punjabi, Urdu, and Cantonese. Students brought to school diverse cultures, religions, and varying degrees of their L1 literacies and English language skills.

The data for this case study were collected over one and one-half years (2004-2005). This project was an ethnographic, action research in which I collaborated closely with Perminder, a grade-4 teacher at Coppard Glen. This research partnership, which developed over the course of the data collection period, consisted of bi-weekly school visits. I participated in the Multiliteracies Committee, a committee established by a group of teachers in the school and headed by Perminder. Using both digital and video recordings, I conducted ethnographic classroom observations with field notes. I also conducted open-ended and semi-structured individual interviews with the 12 teachers on the Multiliteracies Committee; and individual and group interviews with select students in Perminder's grade-4 classroom of 29 students. I participated in school-wide events, collecting photographic data of the inside and outside spaces of the school. Inside the school I photographed multilingual signage, artistic representations of the school's diversity, posters relating to the school's key operating principles underlying linguistic and racial policies, and visual data from Perminder's classroom. Documents and artifacts of students' work (e.g., dual language identity texts) were also collected. These data provided a visual landscape of the diverse spaces, identities, and linguistic and cultural mapping of Coppard Glen.

The research questions that guided this case study were as follows:

- (1) How can teachers' own linguistic and cultural experiences provide a pedagogical base for understanding their students' funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti., 2005)?

- (2) How can students' L1 literacy practices and cultures be incorporated into the English-medium curriculum, using forms of multimodal, multilingual meaning making?
- (3) How can a multiliteracies pedagogy draw on students' identity investment to achieve literacy engagement and learning in meaningful and creative ways?

In the following section, I introduce the initiatives taken by the teachers at Coppard Glen, focusing primarily on how Perminder's journey during 2003-2004 with her 29 grade-4 students led to the identity work that emerged through, for example, dual language identity texts.

TEACHER AND STUDENT MULTILINGUAL IDENTITIES AS PEDAGOGY

In response to school demographics coupled with the initiation of the Multiliteracy Project, one of the initiatives that took place at Coppard Glen was the formation of a Multiliteracies Committee, with Perminder playing a leadership role on this committee. The committee brought together 12 teachers from different grade levels and from diverse linguistic, cultural, racial, and religious backgrounds. This mixed group of teachers came together to create a space to explore, negotiate, and scaffold their own personal and professional identities as part of their varied pedagogical practices. As Morgan (2004) highlights, the process of instruction and the dialogic interaction that takes place within classrooms shapes and reshapes teachers' multiple identities. He states that a teacher is a "fully-autonomous, self-aware subject[s], who is able to freely choose which aspects of his or her identity are of pedagogical value or to know in advance how his or her identity matches up with a particular group of students" (p. 173).

The Multiliteracies Committee wanted (a) to develop classroom-based projects that incorporated language and culture through a multiliteracies pedagogy; (b) to work towards spreading an ethos to validate students' L1 culture and language across the school (e.g., multilingual signage that sends a message to the school community that all languages and cultures are welcome); and (c) to include parents as valuable linguistic and cultural resources for students' literacy development (e.g., Per-

minder invited parents to work as translators for the dual language texts project in her classroom. Mrs Choudry is one parent who helped with the translation of texts to Punjabi).

Through a multiliteracies pedagogy, the Multiliteracies Committee teachers wanted to bring students' linguistic and cultural identities to the fore across their classrooms, which they did by first documenting and deconstructing their beliefs and their linguistic and cultural identities. The teachers created a collaborative poster that showcased their individual reflections. Many had themselves experienced shame and marginalization in relation to their language and culture in an educational context. This experience is expressed in one teacher's reflection and draws on the sentiments expressed by the reflections of others on the Multiliteracies Committee:

As a student, I remember, only too vividly the trauma of walking into a class where I didn't understand much of what went on, of being very afraid, bewildered and deskilled. My rich resource of my first language accumulated over 13 years [had] suddenly been rendered redundant. Children in these situations are left to 'sink or swim.' I do not want that to happen to my students in my class or in my school. (Teacher 3, poster-written)

Dismantling feelings of disempowerment engendered by having to leave identities and languages at the school door were central to the Committee's mandate. The initial exploration of teachers' beliefs on language and identity led to the exploration of students' experiences. Cummins et al. (2005a) foreground the importance of human relationships in students' feelings around schooling: engagement in learning, especially for ESL students, is "fueled as much by affect as by cognition" (p. 2). Recognition and the value placed on students' prior knowledge of their L1 literacies and culture are the focal point for students' adjustment to schooling and, as noted earlier, an important element to understand how learning takes place (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000).

With this understanding in mind, Perminder and other teachers from Coppard Glen asked students across different grade levels to reflect on their first languages (L1) and to write about how they felt using their first languages in school. When the teachers met to discuss students' res-

ponses, they were surprised by the overwhelmingly negative connotation that some students had towards L1 use in the school context.

What began as an exploration of teacher identities, experiences, and beliefs about language and culture developed into researching students' feelings around issues of language and difference as reflected through multilingualism and culture. What emerged were the ways in which students saw themselves positioned by the dominant discourses of schooling as an English monolingual, multicultural space. The following student narratives were reproduced on a 12-foot poster (see www.multiliteracies.ca, go to Coppard Glen). These narratives reflect the range of students' feelings around linguistic and cultural difference and marginalization.

When a person that speaks another language or asks me to speak Tamil, I get scared because sometimes they might think it is funny . . . When I use my mother tongue at home, I don't feel shy at all because everyone speaks Tamil in my family. . . . I think Tamil is very important to learn because without knowing Tamil, I won't be able to speak Tamil to my parents and I won't feel talented. (St 1.4 poster – written)

I am proud of my first language but I'm embarrassed to talk my first language at school because people will make fun of me. I don't think people should talk their mother tongue to put down people but use it to improve studies. (St 2.4 poster – written)

On the one hand, these student narratives point to the importance of their first languages in terms of forging their familiar relationships, the building of self-esteem, and its significance as a means "to improve studies" (st 2.4). On the other hand, these narratives are juxtaposed with feelings of fear and embarrassment that may be incurred if they brought their first languages, cultures, and identities onto school grounds.

The following student also describes the importance of his first language in the construction of his identities and in the claiming of voice within his school context. What is significant in this narrative is the notion of "permission" and what it means to be given "permission" to speak his languages in relation to claiming a voice within the school context. He stated:

I feel that when I speak my first language I will be accepted not rejected. If I had the permission to speak my first language, I will feel confident, free, feel like I can catch a dream and run with it. (St 3.4 poster – written)

This notion of “permission” weaves through the discourse of language, identities, and power within this school. Regardless of the fact that Coppard Glen has a highly diverse minority student population with multiple languages, Perminder stated that students rarely heard their languages spoken within the school. Perminder discussed the conflicting messages that students were given about their linguistic and cultural identities. She stated:

[O]n the PA, they hardly ever hear their teachers, their mainstream teachers wanting to learn even a few words of that language and there’s all kinds of covert messages that children are internalising and it takes me a very long time to get them to open up. (Colloquium Video, 2004)

There are a number of noteworthy points to be made in connection to representation, identity, and voice. The lack of “audibility” (Miller, 2004) for students’ languages heard across the school marginalizes students whose linguistic and cultural capital is rendered as unimportant – whether it is “on the PA” or reproduced by the efforts of some “mainstream” teachers (who advocate for an English-only space). This “silencing” (Giroux, 1992b), or what Miller (2004) sees as “the denial of the right to speak and be heard and the non-hearing of first languages other than English” (p. 293), renders such students unable to self-represent and negotiate their identities through their L1 languages within school spaces. She connects this to Bourdieu’s, (1977) analysis of speaking that is linked to “the power to impose reception” (p. 648), which Miller (2004) sees as inseparable from listening. Teachers (whether mainstream or not) who reproduce dominant discourses of schooling as English-only spaces deny students the right to be positioned and authorized as members of a school community.

Perminder commented further on this point during one of our interviews. She stated that:

... because I am of the SAME group when I encourage them, you know, children still think that, "Oh, she's a minority teacher so it's okay. It's safe to use languages with her. Oh we can see why she is sympathetic and shy she wants to foster this cultural understanding" but, you know, a small effort on the part – because a white teacher is a symbol of larger society out there. So those teachers learning one or two words of their first languages is going to do just as much as ME trying to foster their use of first language. So it's people like that are NOT in a powerless situation I think that people can do a lot but it's in their attitude and what they're willing, how they're willing to look at this issue and what they think education is all about. (Int. November 23rd, 2004, p. 15)

In this instance Perminder's discourse challenges the macro-level discourses of language and power that privilege white, monolingual, monocultural agents in schools and across classrooms. Through this act of naming, Perminder does exactly what Borsa (1990) states, that is, "to be able to name our location, to politicize and to question where our particular experiences and practice fit within the articulations and representations that surround us" (as cited in Giroux, 1992a, p. 26).

What Perminder strongly highlights through her comments is the fact that it is not the sole responsibility of minority teachers in the school to make the effort to reach out to multilingual, multicultural students. Instead, she acknowledges the coercive societal relations of power (Cummins, 2001) that are at play where white privilege exists and affirms the impact that the mainstream, monolingual teachers would make if they were to reach out to these students. Reaching out to these students means going beyond the "holidays and heroes" scenarios (Banks, 1994, 1997) where lip service is given under the guise of multiculturalism to include the voices of minority students and their families. Rather, it is about making conscious pedagogical steps to bring to the forefront students' funds of knowledge into the English-medium classroom. Affirming students' identities and linguistic forms of capital increases their confidence with regards to the way they engage in language and literacy activities in school (Cummins et al., 2005a)

Furthermore, in Perminder's discourse, this notion of permission goes beyond simply allowing students to talk in their home languages. She questioned the role of a teacher as a linguistic gatekeeper who allows or disallows home language use to take place (see Cummins, 2001, for a

discussion of educator role definitions). Moreover, Perminder's pedagogy was fuelled by her own multiple identities and the politics around her self-positioning as a Black woman and as a cultural and religious minority.² She stated:

Who am I? I guess I am an Indo-British Canadian and a global citizen. My reality is shaped significantly by my own world-view, in which power dynamics play a significant role. My identity is impacted also by my linguistic, cultural, social, political and spiritual experiences. Living as a member of the minority community, and as a black woman, my identity is inevitably linked with how the majority members view me. I see my evolving identity as my responsibility, which I need to nurture, protect, strengthen, challenge, and indulge. As we recognize multiple facets of our own identity, and move away from the simplistic notions of cultural identifications, I believe that we are better able to foster the development of our students' multiple identities. The interplay of how we identify ourselves and how the world identifies us, is crucial for our own evolving identity. (Perminder written reflection, November 7, 2004)

This identity narrative highlights the multiple selves embedded within Perminder's discourse. Her multiple identities, ever-changing, are always in process, tempered by a socio-historical memory in relation to the social worlds in which she lives. Perminder calls into play the discourses on identities and representations and how individuals self-position, and how others position them (Hall & du Gay, 1994). Her experiences as a second language learner and her adjustment to the Canadian context, where as a teacher she had experienced what she stated as "professional frustration and deskilling" (Perminder, Int. Nov. 23 04, p. 1), led her to create pedagogical opportunities to engage with her students' linguistic and cultural identities. She did this to access their academic, social, and psychological realities to develop their "deep level thinking" (Interview, Nov. 23 04, p. 1) or what Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000) call instruction for deep understanding, and Cummins

² At the time of the project, Perminder had been teaching for over twenty years. She has taught in the United Kingdom and Canada. She is multilingual and of Sikh background. She was born in India, raised in the United Kingdom, and has been living in Canada for approximately eight years.

(2001) highlights in his Academic Expertise framework as a critical reading of texts.

Pedagogically, Perminder brought her identities and those of her students into the classroom through a number of different pedagogical means that are multimodal, multilingual, and multicultural:

- 1) She co-created a space with her students where languages other than English were audible and cultural artifacts were visible. Poetry and art became the textual, multimodal vehicles through which her class tackled critical discussions on identity, language, race, and difference. The classroom became a space that affirmed student identities and challenged the mainstream curriculum. Perminder's activity went far beyond a token gesture of dressing up the classroom with students' cultural artifacts as a show-and-tell activity. Instead, they became entry points for deeper level discussions that allowed students to reflect and articulate their thoughts around different topics. Students took ownership of the varied ways in which they learned, produced assignments, and drew on their diverse languages and cultures.
- 2) She focused in her classroom on what she called her "identity work," part of which was initiated through our collaborative work to understand students' self-positioning and self-identification. On a number of different levels, we worked together to create activities to have students critically explore their identities, language, and culture through curricular topics such as bullying or war and peace. In multimodal ways, students self-represented and deconstructed what it meant to be multilingual and multicultural, and racially and religiously diverse. For example, through an ongoing process of discussions on identity and self-concept, students' created artwork.³ The completion of the artwork was followed by an open discussion on "how we see ourselves and how others see us." This activity occurred around the various themes of perspectives and difference. Students were encouraged to write words on the poster. What emerged was a multilingual, open dictionary with words that des-

³ For example, students created self-images using various media and colours on a large blank sheet that filled one wall of the classroom which was visible from the entrance to the classroom.

cribed who they were in a positive and affirming light. Perminder then used this experience for other activities – in students' writing work and in their morning discussions where they would add new words, use existing words in sentences, and also translate words in different languages.

This project, part of a series of activities that focused on self-concept, had students write about, articulate, and visually represent how they saw others and how they saw themselves. At every stage, Perminder had students share their thoughts in a post-activity, whole-class discussion to deconstruct the activity for them and to have them think critically on how words and the use of words to describe how "others see us" could cut down or boost one's self-concept. (See www.multiliteracies.ca, go to Coppard Glen). Perminder also worked through the creation of dual language identity texts. These texts are defined as:

the products of students' creative work or performances carried out within the pedagogical space orchestrated by the classroom teacher. Students invest their identities in the creation of these texts, which can be written, spoken, visual, dramatic, or combinations in multimodal forms. (Cummins et al., 2005a, p. 24)

These books were then scanned and uploaded to the Multiliteracy Project web site. Thus, this activity engaged students on a cognitive, affective, and creative level to produce authentic texts that affirmed their multiple identities through multiliterate practices.

In the following section, I focus on the first dual language text project that Perminder initiated in 2003-2004 with her grade-4 class. In many ways Perminder was creating the conditions where students could claim their voices, giving meaning to their dreams, desires, fears, and subject positions. As bell hooks states: "Awareness of the need to speak, to give voice to the varied dimensions of our lives, is one way [to begin] the process of education for critical consciousness" (as cited in Giroux, 1992a, pp. 169-170). Giroux (1992a) goes on to expand that "educators need to approach learning not merely as the acquisition of knowledge but as the production of cultural practices that offer students a sense of identity, place, and hope" (p. 170).

When teachers and students create an interpersonal space within the English-medium classroom, they create and re-create identity options to permit students' linguistic and cultural identities to enter, thus challenging educational power dynamics. This change opens up the possibility for collaborative engagement in learning that leads to cognitive development and academic achievement (Cummins, 2001; Cummins et al., 2005a). As noted earlier, Perminder's pedagogy wove L1 language, culture, and identity throughout. She worked to move beyond a surface treatment of these issues that had a deep impact on students' sense of self-esteem and sense of place in the world beyond her classroom.

DUAL LANGUAGE IDENTITY TEXTS: COLLABORATIVE WRITING WITHIN A MULTILINGUAL CONTEXT

For Perminder, acknowledging and actively promoting students' languages and culture was not simply about activating students' prior knowledge. It was much more fundamentally fused with a "pedagogy of respect" (Cummins et al., 2005b, p. 42). She stated:

I just look at it not as an add-on. It informs my practice right through and through. It runs in the bloodstream of my classroom. . . . It's about relationships; it's all about how we approach, how we validate students' identities and how they accept their own [identities]. The ethos [shows up] in the running of the classroom, in every subject. It doesn't take two extra minutes of my time to get them to see the humanity of another human being at a most basic level. . . . And yet ESL [is] always perceived as an add-on. All my students are ESL because for them English is a second language. (ML Teacher – Focus Group Interview)

As noted above, Perminder's pedagogical positioning drew on her own experiences and identities which she injected into the heart and soul of her classroom where she honoured and valued her students whom she saw as multiliterate and multilingual. In her view, all students were ESL because they had another language at home, and as such she equalized the differences that might be apparent between Canadian-born and newly arrived immigrant students. As part of Perminder's pedagogical strategy for stretching the English mainstream curriculum to incorporate students' linguistic and cultural resources, she expanded on the Language Arts curriculum with regards to writing and publishing stories.

Perminder brought in published books in students' home languages, led discussions with her class about students' languages and culture, and developed a dual language writing project that gave students a purposeful reason for writing in their first language. Also, she introduced students to dual language books completed at Thornwood Public School.⁴ Students were given the opportunity to self-select book themes and to write in the languages of their choice.

The 29 students who were involved in the dual language text project had a variety of L1 literacies and abilities. Students worked collaboratively in the process of narrative writing, editing, composing, and visually representing their stories in various languages. For example, one dual language story, written in Chinese and English, was about family conflict – two families who did not get along and then were shipwrecked on an island and had to work together, understanding each other's different perspectives and cultural backgrounds (see www.multiliteracies.ca, go to Coppard Glen).

Perminder based the student pairings on the children's social-emotional levels, and their literacy and language strengths in their first language and English. For the students it was the first time that they were actively engaging in multiliterate practices in their L1 and English. Perminder recounted to me that students who were afraid to use their L1 language in the classroom were now working with multilingual dictionaries (e.g., babel fish),⁵ and simultaneously translating between English and their home languages.

Students also spoke about the writing process and how they drew upon their multiliterate abilities. In some cases, for Perminder, it was a discovery of the types of linguistic abilities that her students possessed. For example, in the production of the dual language text, *The Hook*, (see www.multiliteracies.ca, go to Coppard Glen), Jananan (one of the student authors) spoke in a video interview about simultaneously translating English/Tamil, and collaborating with his partner, Sunny, on the textual and visual components of the book. He also talked about how his uncle and father engaged with the production of the text in Tamil and how their help allowed for the gap between literacy practices within the

⁴ See Dual Language Showcase (<http://thornwoodps.dyndns.org/dual/index.htm>)

⁵ Babel fish is online translating service on Yahoo.

home to become foregrounded at school. Jananan talked about the writing process as follows:

First like there was 12 pages of the story. Me and Sunny took six separate pages each. . . . We composed the story together. We decided to do the story in Tamil and I would do it on my computer at home and then Sunny would write again in his language . . . we would have two copies one in English and Tamil, one [in] English and Punjabi. (Video Interview, 2004)

The video interview with Jananan and Sunny broadened to show how they could recognize and read different scripts from the books that Periminder had on display in the classroom and the work that was displayed on the walls where students had written their language biographies (see www.Multiliteracies.ca, go to Coppard Glen). This activity shows the important metalinguistic talk that emerged as Jananan and Sunny looked at the multilingual books, their different scripts, and how ideas are represented across different languages.

The importance and value of book authoring is captured in the following interview with two students – Arshia a grade-4 student and Vasko a grade-7 student – who were producing a multilingual identity text “Around the World in 80 days”:⁶ They explained:

Vasko: Just the whole idea of . . . making a book.

Arshia: Yeah like publishing it.

Vasko: publishing it.

Arshia: It’s almost like we’re like authors but except younger. Because authors are usually / most of them are like grown ups and stuff. Important as if like we’re actually REAL authors ourselves and making a book. . . . For the books that the grade 4s did last year I did a picture for them. And it was fun to go see my picture on the Internet. . . . Also I think, I thought it was kinda a good idea making it in different languages because since like it’s going to be on the Internet and stuff then the, the, maybe the grandparents or parents can read it and tell like other people. (CG DL video 3)

The importance of taking ownership of these identity texts and the power of becoming real authors is part of this creative process. These stu-

⁶ These data come from a second dual language identity text project where Periminder and her grade-4 students collaborated with a grade-7 class and their teacher Jo-Anne.

dents were engaged in this process and understood the significance of technology to enable the sharing of these texts on the Internet with family members beyond their social context. Thus here technology functions to affirm and enhance identity investment.

The creation of these texts encourages the co-construction of knowledge and multiple dialogues between teacher-student, student-student, and student-parents-teachers. This multiliteracies work points to the importance of harnessing students' out-of school literacy skills and communicative practices to support academic attainment. As Cummins et al. (2005a) note, these identity texts:

... hold a mirror up to the student in which his or her identity is reflected back in a positive light. When students share identity texts with multiple audiences (peers, teachers, parents, grandparents, sister classes, the media, etc.) they are likely to receive positive feedback and affirmation of self in interaction with these audiences. (p. 24)

The creation of these texts encourages the co-construction of knowledge and multiple dialogues between teacher-student, student-student, and students-parents-teachers. In multiple linguistic ways, these texts actively incorporated children's first language skills, they enhanced metalinguistic awareness and development, and enabled students' identities to come to the fore.

CONCLUSION

In this article I have foregrounded the pedagogical opportunities in learning for engaging multilingual, multiliterate students, who have increasingly become the norm in large urban classrooms. The shape of the new economy, and the requirements for succeeding in a knowledge society, raise issues with regards to what it means to be literate and the range of literacy practices necessary to be global citizens.

Although an abundance of research not only maps out the key factors needed for learning to be successful, and how to engage ESL learners, in particular, to transfer their knowledge of their L1 in the learning of academic English, the pedagogies that dominate classrooms are ones where literacy equates to English-only and where students' and their

families' linguistic and cultural forms of capital and identities are left at the school door.

This article showcases Coppard Glen Public School where the work of teachers, in particular Perminder, addressed discourses of language, culture, and identity across their classrooms. While keeping in mind the curricular standards and expectations embedded within the English-medium curriculum, Perminder made alternative pedagogical choices that drew on her own identities and linguistic and cultural forms of capital to create learning spaces to draw upon students' linguistic and cultural forms of capital in important ways through the use of dual language identity texts. As noted, the identity work, and in particular the identity text project, not only reframed and affirmed the linguistic and cultural resources that students possessed but also transformed the roles of parents, the types of L1 literacy practices at home, and the funds of knowledge in their communities as important resources in English literacy attainment in the classroom. Furthermore, the impact of sharing their stories electronically reinforced students' literacy practices as vital to academic growth and identity investment.

If education for the twenty-first century is to prepare students to deal with the new demands on literacies and the rapidly changing technological terrain, then educators should invest in students' multiliteracies and multilingual identities as resources inside classrooms and schools. To leave them at the school door sends a message that students' and their families' linguistic and cultural capital are not welcome and are unimportant. The responsibility to advocate for change lies not only with teachers, students, and their families, but also with principals, administrators, superintendents, schools, and governments, both provincial and federal.

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